

Healthy Living

Patient Information from the American Chiropractic Association

Osteoporosis: Not Just an Elderly Disease

Osteoporosis has become an epidemic in the United States. About 10 million people—80 percent of them women—suffer from the chronic condition that leads to debilitating and life-threatening fractures. What's worse, the number of people with low bone mass—high risk for osteoporosis development—keeps growing. While 34 million people now have low bone mass, by 2010, the number is expected to climb to 52 million.

The reasons for the increase are not yet clear, but research points to lifestyle and diet. The bony structure is built in childhood—and weight-bearing physical activity and proper nutrition are essential. Today's children, however, spend most of their time sitting in front of TV sets or computer monitors and drink calcium-robbing sodas, instead of calcium-rich milk. The inactivity and calcium imbalance makes them more likely to develop osteoporosis.

Osteoporosis Screening

One of the most common bone diseases, osteoporosis is also one of the most preventable. Because osteoporosis is painless until a fracture actually occurs, bone density screening should be used to help diagnose the disease early on. The screening should be done every 2 years, especially in people with the following risk factors for osteoporosis development:

- Female
- Menopausal
- Small frame
- Ovary removal or menopause by age 45
- Prolonged hormonal imbalances
- Known calcium and vitamin D deficiencies
- Insufficient physical activity
- White or Asian ancestry
- Smoker
- Excess caffeine intake (more than 3 cups of coffee, tea or soda a day)
- More than 2 alcoholic drinks per day



While osteoporosis is often thought of as an older person's disease, it can strike at any age, and is especially prevalent in women.

- Regular use of certain medications (glucocorticoids, thyroid hormone, anticonvulsants, and aluminum-containing antacids)
- History of eating disorders

Osteoporosis screening and prevention are especially important because bone loss is irreversible and can only be stabilized, not improved, unless one uses a medication.

The American Chiropractic Association recommends the following tips for preventing and managing osteoporosis:

Exercise

Start a regular exercise program. Exercise puts stress on the bone and helps it strengthen and remodel. Exercise for at least 20 minutes 3 times a week. However, if you have had a fracture, fall frequently, or have osteoporosis, consult with your health care provider before starting any exercise program.

Tai Chi and other weight-bearing activities, such as jogging, walking, stair climbing, playing racquet sports,

Osteoporosis Fast Facts

One in two women and one in four men over age 50 will have an osteoporosis-related fracture in her/his remaining lifetime.

Osteoporosis is responsible for more than 1.5 million fractures annually, including:

- more than 300,000 hip fractures; and
- 700,000 vertebral fractures;
- 250,000 wrist fractures; and
- 300,000 fractures at other sites.

While osteoporosis is often thought of as an older person's disease, it can strike at any age, and people of all ethnic backgrounds are at risk.

aerobics, and dancing, can be beneficial. These exercises improve flexibility and balance, reducing the risk of falling and fractures.

Resistance exercises that increase muscle mass and strengthen bones, such as weight lifting, are generally recommended.

Spend time outdoors. Exposure to sunlight increases your level of vitamin D—a necessary element for absorption of calcium, which prevents osteoporosis development.

Safety Precautions

Be careful when bending and lifting heavy objects, including children. When lifting, bend from the knees, not the waist, and try to avoid hunching over while sitting or standing.

Remove throw rugs, electrical cords, and other objects you may trip on from the areas where you walk. Falls from a standing position for an osteoporosis patient often mean fractures.

Nutrition and Supplementation

Decrease consumption of foods high in phosphorus, such as soda, potato chips, hot dogs, bacon, beer, biscuits, crackers, white rice, liver, bologna and peanuts. Too much phosphorus decreases absorption of calcium and other minerals and weakens the bone.

Calcium is essential to building and protecting the bones. Good sources of calcium are milk, cheese, yogurt, broccoli, kale, spinach, and rhubarb. A glass of milk and a cup of yogurt add 600 mg of calcium to your daily diet.

If you are looking for a calcium supplement, try one that's highly absorbable, such as microcrystalline hydroxyapatite concentrate (MCHC), or one of the malates, fumarates, succinates, glutarates, or citrates. But don't overdo it. Excess calcium may cause kidney stones, so ask your health care provider about your individual supplement amount.

Check with your health care provider if you are getting enough vitamin D. Without vitamin D, the body won't absorb calcium. ■

ACA American Chiropractic Association

For more information on prevention and wellness, or to find a doctor of chiropractic near you, go to the Patient Information section on ACA's Web site at www.aca-today.org or call 800-986-4636.

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